

VIDEO-STILL



PHOTOGRAPHY

'FROZEN MOMENTS IN TIME'

The future of all video lies in its aesthetic application

by Laurence Gartel

The same tools of technology used to gather information and produce entertainment can also be used to create aesthetic imagery, or video art. A home video system consisting of a basic monitor or TV set, a videotape recorder, and a color video camera can produce some unique visual metaphors.

Unlike a film camera, which records images onto a light-sensitive film emulsion, a video camera turns light into an electronic signal; there is no need for chemical processing. Video is instant—what you see through the viewfinder of your video camera is what you get on your monitor. Since it is all being done in front of you, you see the results immediately.

My technique is to freeze a "situation" on the video monitor and, after incorporating whatever special effects I want, take a still photograph of the screen image.

The system used for taking video-still photographs works in sequence: the video camera is connected to the videotape recorder, which is connected to the TV monitor. The video camera reads a subject as an elec-

A video-still "self-portrait" taken by the author portrays a traditional-looking homburg-topped gentleman in an avant garde art form mixing video imagery and still photography.



(above) The author sets up his video-still shot of cup and saucer. Proper lighting is crucial to the sensitive video camera. (below) The VCR is connected to the video camera. When focused on the subject, the camera sends the image to the TV monitor, from which the 35 mm photo is taken.



Fine tuning is a must, and the artist (above) adjusts the picture clarity and composition while taking a light reading with his tripod-mounted 35 mm camera. After making the desired adjustments (below), the image on the monitor is brought into focus and forever frozen in time.





tronic signal and sends it to the VTR and to the monitor.

Setting Up the "Situation": How you illuminate your subject will determine the final look. The more intense the lighting, the more graphic an effect you will see on the screen. The distance of the light source from the object being photographed will also determine the final result; the closer the source of light to the subject, and the higher the degree of brightness, the more loss of gray tonality. Because I will be shooting di-

Larry Gartel's work will be on exhibit April 1 at Nikon House, in New York City's Rockefeller Center.

rectly from the monitor, the image will appear with the grid pattern of the screen—therefore I want to light my image to reduce the grid pattern as much as possible. The grid pattern is reduced in black areas, and it bleaches out in white, overexposed areas; it generally is most visible in the gray areas.

The video camera is very light-sensitive, much more so than a still camera. In addition to external lighting, you can control the level of incoming light so you have the choice of dark or light imagery by adjusting the aperture opening on the video camera.

One of the most effective tools for

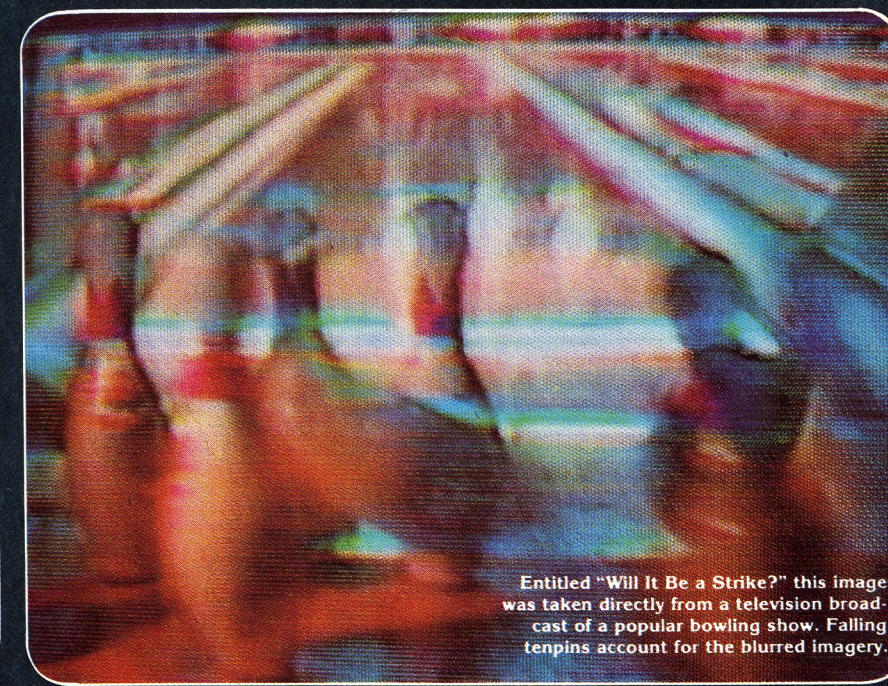
video-still photography is the special effects generator. An aspect of this machine called the "matte mode" can create overlays of different images. It takes the highest luminance information of the subject and varies the gray scale of that subject, which could be black, white, or any shade of gray. This information is then inset over the original picture. The special effects generator can transform the luminance information into either a positive or negative image, or transform the normal original into a positive or negative image.

Once the desired effect is achieved, the subject is "colorized" by either incorporating a special colorizing unit

Dual images—or overlays—are achieved with a special effects generator that takes the highest luminance information and inserts it over the original image.



Forever preserved, at least on film, these fruit and leaves project an almost icelike radiance. A "colorization" method achieved by working controls on the monitor is responsible for the eerie, abstract look.



Entitled "Will It Be a Strike?" this image was taken directly from a television broadcast of a popular bowling show. Falling tenpins account for the blurred imagery.

or working the dials of the TV monitor. The "bright" dial acts as your luminance (brightness) control and can modulate colors. The "color" dial acts as your chrominance (level of saturation or intensity of color) level, and the "tint" dial changes the variety of colors to be used.

The great advantage of video, of course, is its immediate playback. You can see problems as they arise—improper registration, for example—and make immediate corrections with relative ease.

Making the Photograph: An aperture-priority or shutter-priority 35 mm camera should be used for video-still photography. Both allow

for fast decision-making and offer a stable structure to maintain consistency while shooting.

It's important to avoid as much as possible having a scan line visible on the final photographic print. Though there's no foolproof method to achieve this, setting the proper shutter speed on the camera helps. Generally, shooting between 1/55 of a second and 1/30 of a second will lower the odds of seeing the line.

If you want to maintain sharp focus, the camera must be mounted on a tripod when shooting at that speed. Of course, if you want blurred movement, a tripod need not be used.

Once the photograph is taken to

your satisfaction, and a slide transparency has been made, the last step is making a final print, bypassing the internegative stage. For my final prints I prefer to use a plastic-coated paper called Cibachrome, which produces the richest, most saturated colors on the market.

Remember that experimentation is the key to successful video production. Some people are afraid to venture outside of safe, familiar territory, but it's okay to make a mistake. Get to know your equipment and its full potential. You will never know what's possible until you try.

The future of all video lies in its aesthetic application.